

## **Department of Energy**

### **Worker Advocacy Office**

*The Workers' Advocate*

The Department of Energy (DOE) is establishing a workers' advocacy office to help qualified current and former employees of DOE contractors get benefits through state workers' compensation programs. The Worker Advocacy Office will also help the department's employees with qualifying occupational illnesses, make claims to the U.S. Department of Labor for benefits under the Federal Employees Compensation Act.

The office will be headed by a director reporting to the Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety and Health. It will utilize independent physicians who specialize in occupational health to determine if diseases are work-related.

#### **Worker Advocacy Office Functions**

- Work with benefits administrators to review and track the dozens of compensation claims for occupational illnesses currently pending in the department's system.
- Expedite claims that can be processed without further review and help workers get any additional information needed to process the remaining claims.
- Operate a toll-free hotline for workers who are interested in filing workers' compensation claims with their state programs or need assistance with previously filed claims.
- Develop and implement a program to educate and reach out to workers and their families, unions and others about the benefits and assistance available to sick workers and their survivors.
- Have worker advocates, who will serve as liaisons with state workers' compensation programs, benefits administrators, occupational physicians, union representatives, workers' compensation experts, and others. The role of these advocates, who are not legal representatives for workers, is to:
  - identify existing and perceived barriers to filing successful workers' compensation claims; and
  - establish criteria, processes and procedures for when and how to help workers file benefits claims for occupational illnesses.

#### **Proposed Future Functions**

The office will administer the program to provide compensation benefits to workers with beryllium-related lung disease or radiogenic cancers, as well as the programs that compensate workers with certain cancers at the gaseous diffusion plants in Paducah, Ky., Piketon, Ohio and Oak Ridge, Tenn., and the pilot program for workers at the East Tennessee Technology Park.